

The Sons of La Malinche

Our hermeticism is baffling or even offensive to strangers, and it has created the legend of the Mexican as an inscrutable being. Our suspicions keep us at a distance. Our courtesy may be attractive but our reserve is chilling, and the stranger is always disconcerted by the unforeseen violence that lacerates us, by the solemn or convulsive splendor of our fiestas, by our cult of death. The impression we create is much like that created by Orientals. They too — the Chinese, the Hindus, the Arabs — are hermetic and indecipherable. They too carry about with them, in rags, a still-living past. There is a Mexican mystery just as there is a yellow mystery or a black. The details of the image formed of us often vary with the spectator, but it is always an ambiguous if not contradictory image: we are insecure, and our responses, like our silences, are unexpected and unpredictable. Treachery, loyalty, crime and love hide out in the depths of our glance. We attract and repel.

It is not difficult to understand the origins of this attitude toward us. The European considers Mexico to be a country on the margin of universal history, and everything that is distant from the center of his society strikes him as strange and impenetrable. The peasant — remote, conservative, somewhat archaic in his ways of dressing and speaking, fond of expressing himself in traditional modes and formulas — has always had a certain fascination for the urban man. In every country he represents the most ancient and secret element of society. For everyone but himself he embodies the occult, the hidden, that

which surrenders itself only with great difficulty: a buried treasure, a seed that sprouts in the bowels of the earth, an ancient wisdom hiding among the folds of the land.

Woman is another being who lives apart and is therefore an enigmatic figure. It would be better to say that she is the Enigma. She attracts and repels like men of an alien race or nationality. She is an image of both fecundity and death. In almost every culture the goddesses of creation are also goddesses of destruction. Woman is a living symbol of the strangeness of the universe and its radical heterogeneity. As such, does she hide life within herself, or death? What does she think? Or does she think? Does she truly have feelings? Is she the same as we are? Sadism begins as a revenge against feminine hermeticism or as a desperate attempt to obtain a response from a body we fear is insensible. As Luis Cernuda has said, "Desire is a question that has no answer." Despite woman's full, rounded nakedness, there is always something on guard in her:

*Eve and Aphrodite concentrate the mystery
of the world's heart.*

Rubén Darío, like all the other great poets, considered woman to be not only an instrument of knowledge but also knowledge itself. It is a knowledge we will never possess, the sum of our definitive ignorance: the supreme mystery.

It is noteworthy that our images of the working class are not colored with similar feelings, even though the worker also lives apart from the center of society, physically as well as otherwise, in districts and special communities. When a contemporary novelist introduces a character who symbolizes health or destruction, fertility or death, he rarely chooses a worker, despite the fact that the worker represents the death of an old society and the birth of a new. D. H. Lawrence, one of the profoundest

and most violent critics of the modern world, repeatedly describes the virtues that would transform the fragmentary man of our time into a true man with a total vision of the world. In order to embody these virtues he creates characters who belong to ancient or non-European races, or he invents the figure of Mellors the gamekeeper, a son of the earth. It is possible that Lawrence's childhood among the coal mines of England explains this deliberate omission: we know that he detested workers as much as he did the bourgeoisie. But how can we explain the fact that in the great revolutionary novels the proletariat again does not provide the heroes, merely the background? In all of them the hero is an adventurer, an intellectual, or a professional revolutionary: an isolated individual who has renounced his class, his origins or his homeland. It is no doubt a legacy from Romanticism that makes the hero an antisocial being. Also, the worker is too recent, and he resembles his boss because they are both sons of the machine.

The modern worker lacks individuality. The class is stronger than the individual and his personality dissolves in the generic. That is the first and gravest mutilation a man suffers when he transforms himself into an industrial wage earner. Capitalism deprives him of his human nature (this does not happen to the servant) by reducing him to an element in the work process, *i.e.*, to an object. And like any object in the business world, he can be bought and sold. Because of his social condition he quickly loses any concrete and human relationship to the world. The machines he operates are not his and neither are the things he produces. Actually he is not a worker at all, because he does not create individual works or is so occupied with one aspect of production that he is not conscious of those he does create. He is a laborer, which is an abstract noun designating a mere function rather than a specific job. Therefore his efforts, unlike

those of a doctor, an engineer or a carpenter, cannot be distinguished from those of other men. The abstraction that characterizes him — work measured by time — does not separate him from other abstractions. On the contrary, it binds him to them. This is the reason he is lacking in mystery, in strangeness. It is the cause of his transparency, which is no different from that of any other instrument.

The complexity of contemporary society and the specialization required by its work extend the abstract condition of the worker to other social groups. It is said that we live in a world of techniques. Despite the differences in salary and way of life, the situation of the technician is essentially like that of the worker: he too is salaried and lacks a true awareness of what he creates. A government of technicians — the ideal of contemporary society — would thus be a government of instruments. Functions would be substituted for ends, and means for creators. Society would progress with great efficiency but without aim, and the repetition of the same gesture, a distinction of the machine, would bring about an unknown form of immobility, that of a mechanism advancing from nowhere toward nowhere.

The totalitarian regimes have done nothing but extend this condition and make it general, by means of force or propaganda. Everyone under their rule suffers from it. In a certain sense it is a transposition of the capitalist system to the social and political sphere. Mass production is characterized by the fabricating of separate units which are then put together in special workshops. Propaganda and totalitarian politics, such as terrorism and repression, employ the same system. Propaganda spreads incomplete truths, in series and as separate units. Later these fragments are organized and converted into political theories, which become absolute truths for the masses. Terrorism obeys the same rules. It begins with the persecution of isolated groups

— races, classes, dissenters, suspects — until gradually it touches everyone. At the outset, a part of society regards the extermination of other groups with indifference, or even contributes to their persecution, because it is corrupted by internal hatreds. Everyone becomes an accomplice and the guilt feelings spread through the whole society. Terrorism becomes generalized, until there are no longer either persecutors or persecuted. The persecutor is soon transformed into the persecuted. One turn of the political mechanism is enough. And no one can escape from this fierce dialectic, not even the leaders themselves.

The world of terrorism, like that of mass production, is a world of things, of utensils. (Hence the vanity of the dispute over the historical validity of modern terrorism.) Utensils are never mysterious or enigmatic, since mystery comes from the indetermination of the being or object that contains it. A mysterious ring separates itself immediately from the generic ring; it acquires a life of its own and ceases to be an object. Surprise lurks in its form, hidden, ready to leap out. Mystery is an occult force or efficacy that does not obey us, and we never know how or when it will manifest itself. But utensils do not hide anything; they never question us and they never answer our questions. They are unequivocal and transparent, mere prolongations of our hands, with only as much life as our will lends them. When they are old and worn out, we throw them away without a thought, into the wastebasket, the automobile graveyard, the concentration camp. Or we exchange them with our allies or enemies for other objects.

All our faculties, and all our defects as well, are opposed to this conception of work as an impersonal action repeated in equal and empty portions of time. The Mexican works slowly and carefully; he loves the completed work and each of the details that make it up; and his innate good taste is an ancient

heritage. If we do not mass produce products, we vie with one another in the difficult, exquisite and useless art of dressing fleas. This does not mean that the Mexican is incapable of being converted into what is called a "good worker." It is only a question of time. Nothing except a historical change, daily more remote and unlikely, can prevent the Mexican — who is still a problem, an enigmatic figure — from becoming one more abstraction.

When this moment arrives, it will resolve all our contradictions by annihilating them, but meanwhile I want to point out that the most extraordinary fact of our situation is that we are enigmatic not only to strangers but also to ourselves. The Mexican is always a problem, both for other Mexicans and for himself. There is nothing simpler, therefore, than to reduce the whole complex group of attitudes that characterize us — especially the problem that we constitute for our own selves — to what may be called the "servant mentality," in opposition to the "psychology of the master" and also to that of modern man, whether proletarian or bourgeois.

Suspicion, dissimulation, irony, the courtesy that shuts us away from the stranger, all of the psychic oscillations with which, in eluding a strange glance, we elude ourselves, are traits of a subjected people who tremble and disguise themselves in the presence of the master. It is revealing that our intimacy never flowers in a natural way, only when incited by fiestas, alcohol or death. Slaves, servants and submerged races always wear a mask, whether smiling or sullen. Only when they are alone, during the great moments of life, do they dare to show themselves as they really are. All their relationships are poisoned by fear and suspicion: fear of the master and suspicion of their equals. Each keeps watch over the other because every companion could also be a traitor. To escape from himself the ser-

vant must leap walls, get drunk, forget his condition. He must live alone, without witnesses. He dares to be himself only in solitude.

The unquestionable analogy that can be observed between certain of our attitudes and those of groups subservient to the power of a lord, a caste or a foreign state could be resolved in this statement: the character of the Mexican is a product of the social circumstances that prevail in our country, and the history of Mexico, which is the history of these circumstances, contains the answer to every question. The situation that prevailed during the colonial period would thus be the source of our closed, unstable attitude. Our history as an independent nation would contribute to perpetuating and strengthening this servant psychology, for we have not succeeded in overcoming the misery of the common people and our exasperating social differences, despite a century and a half of struggle and constitutional experience. The use of violence as a dialectical resource, the abuse of authority by the powerful (a vice that has not disappeared) and, finally, the scepticism and resignation of the people — all of these more visible today than ever before, due to our successive post-revolution disillusionments — would complete the historical explication.

The fault of interpretations like the one I have just sketched out is their simplicity. Our attitude toward life is not conditioned by historical events, at least not in the rigorous manner in which the velocity or trajectory of a missile is determined by a set of known factors. Our living attitude — a factor we can never know completely, since change and indetermination are the only constants of our existence — is history also. This is to say that historical events are something more than events because they are colored by humanity, which is always problematical. And they are not merely the result of other events,

but rather of a single will that is capable, within certain limits, of ruling their outcome. History is not a mechanism, and the influences among diverse components of an historical event are reciprocal, as has been said so often. What distinguishes one historical event from another is its historical character: in itself and by itself it is an irreducible unity. Irreducible and inseparable. A historical event is not the sum of its component factors but an indissoluble reality. Historical circumstances explain our character to the extent that our character explains those circumstances. Both are the same. Thus any purely historical explanation is insufficient . . . which is not the same as saying it is false.

One observation will be enough to reduce the analogy between the psychology of the servant and our own to its true proportions: the habitual reactions of the Mexican are not limited to a single class, race or isolated group in an inferior position. The wealthy classes also shut themselves away from the exterior world, and lacerate themselves whenever they open out. It is an attitude that goes beyond historical circumstances, although it makes use of them to manifest itself and is modified by contact with them. The Mexican, like all men, converts these circumstances into plastic material. As he molds them he also molds himself.

If it is not possible to identify our character with that of submerged groups, it is also impossible to deny a close relationship. In both situations the individual and the group struggle simultaneously and contradictorily to hide and to reveal themselves. But a difference separates us. Servants, slaves or races victimized by an outside power (the North American Negro, for example) struggle against a concrete reality. We, however, struggle with imaginary entities, with vestiges of the past or self-engendered phantasms. These vestiges and phantasms are real, at least to us. Their reality is of a subtle and cruel order,

because it is a phantasmagoric reality. They are impalpable and invincible because they are not outside us but within us. In the struggle which our will-to-be carries on against them, they are supported by a secret and powerful ally, our fear of being. Everything that makes up the present-day Mexican, as we have seen, can be reduced to this: the Mexican does not want or does not dare to be himself.

In many instances these phantasms are vestiges of past realities. Their origins are in the Conquest, the Colonial period, the Independence period or the wars fought against the United States and France. Others reflect our current problems, but in an indirect manner, concealing or distorting their true nature. Is it not extraordinary that the effects persist after the causes have disappeared? And that the effects hide the causes? In this sphere it is impossible to distinguish between causes and effects. Actually there *are* no causes and effects, merely a complex of interpenetrating reactions and tendencies. The persistence of certain attitudes, and the freedom and independence they assume in relation to the causes that created them, induce us to study them in the living flesh of the present rather than in history books.

History, then, can clarify the origins of many of our phantasms, but it cannot dissipate them. We must confront them ourselves. Or to put it another way: history helps us to understand certain traits of our character, provided we are capable of isolating and defining them beforehand. We are the only persons who can answer the questions asked us by reality and our own being.

In our daily language there is a group of words that are prohibited, secret, without clear meanings. We confide the expression of our most brutal or subtle emotions and reactions to their

magical ambiguities. They are evil words, and we utter them in a loud voice only when we are not in control of ourselves. In a confused way they reflect our intimacy: the explosions of our vitality light them up and the depressions of our spirit darken them. They constitute a sacred language like those of children, poetry and sects. Each letter and syllable has a double life, at once luminous and obscure, that reveals and hides us. They are words that say nothing and say everything. Adolescents, when they want to appear like men, speak them in a hoarse voice. Women also repeat them, sometimes to demonstrate their freedom of spirit, sometimes to prove the truth of their feelings. But these words are definitive and categorical, despite their ambiguities and the ease with which their meanings change. They are the bad words, the only living language in a world of anemic vocables. They are poetry within the reach of everyone.

Each country has its own. In ours, with their brief, aggressive, electric syllables, resembling the flash given off by a knife when it strikes a hard opaque body, we condense all our appetites, all our hatreds and enthusiasms, all the longings that rage unexpressed in the depths of our being. The word is our sign and seal. By means of it we recognize each other among strangers, and we use it every time the real conditions of our being rise to our lips. To know it, to use it, to throw it in the air like a toy or to make it quiver like a sharp weapon, is a way of affirming that we are Mexican.

All of our anxious tensions express themselves in a phrase we use when anger, joy or enthusiasm cause us to exalt our condition as Mexicans: "*¡Viva México, hijos de la chingada!*" This phrase is a true battle cry, charged with a peculiar electricity; it is a challenge and an affirmation, a shot fired against an imaginary enemy, and an explosion in the air. Once again,

with a certain pathetic and plastic fatality, we are presented with the image of a skyrocket that climbs into the sky, bursts in a shower of sparks and then falls in darkness. Or with the image of that howl that ends all our songs and possesses the same ambiguous resonance: an angry joy, a destructive affirmation ripping open the breast and consuming itself.

When we shout this cry on the fifteenth of September, the anniversary of our independence, we affirm ourselves in front of, against and in spite of the "others." Who are the "others"? They are the *hijos de la chingada*: strangers, bad Mexicans, our enemies, our rivals. In any case, the "others," that is, all those who are not as we are. And these "others" are not defined except as the sons of a mother as vague and indeterminate as themselves.

Who is the *Chingada*? Above all, she is the Mother. Not a Mother of flesh and blood but a mythical figure. The *Chingada* is one of the Mexican representations of Maternity, like *La Llorona* or the "long-suffering Mexican mother" we celebrate on the tenth of May.¹ The *Chingada* is the mother who has suffered — metaphorically or actually — the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her her name. It would be worth while to examine that verb.

Darío Rubio, in his *Anarquía del lenguaje en la América Española*, examines the origins of *chingar* and enumerates the meanings given it by almost all Spanish-American people. It probably comes from the Aztecs: *chingaste* (lees, residue, sediment) is *xinachtli* (garden seed) or *xinaxtli* (fermented maguey juice). The word and its derivatives are used in most of America

¹The "Weeping Woman," who wanders through the streets late at night, weeping and crying out. This belief, still current in some parts of Mexico, derives from pre-Conquest times, when "La Llorona" was the earth-goddess Cihuacóatl. The 10th of May is Mother's Day. — *Tr.*

and parts of Spain in association with drinks, alcoholic or otherwise. In Guatemala and El Salvador *chingaste* means the residue or dregs that remain in a glass. In Oaxaca coffee lees are called *chingaditos*. Throughout Mexico alcohol is called *chinguere* — or, significantly, *piquete*.² In Chile, Peru and Ecuador a *chingana* is a tavern. In Spain *chingar* means to drink a great deal, to get drunk. In Cuba a *chinguirito* is a shot of alcohol.

Chingar also implies the idea of failure. In Chile and Argentina a petard *se chinga* when it fails to explode, and businesses that fail, fiestas that are rained out, actions that are not completed, also *se chingan*. In Colombia *chingarse* means to be disappointed. In Argentina a torn dress is a *vestido chingado*. Almost everywhere *chingarse* means to be made a fool of, to be involved in a fiasco. In some parts of South America *chingar* means to molest, to censure, to ridicule. It is always an aggressive verb, as can be seen in these further meanings: to dock an animal, to incite or prod a fighting-cock, to make merry, to crack a whip, to endanger, to neglect, to frustrate.

In Mexico the word has innumerable meanings. It is a magical word: a change of tone, a change of inflection, is enough to change its meaning. It has as many shadings as it has intonations, as many meanings as it has emotions. One may be a *chingón*, a *gran chingón* (in business, in politics, in crime or with women), or a *chingaquieto* (silent, deceptive, fashioning plots in the shadows, advancing cautiously and then striking with a club), or a *chingoncito*. But in this plurality of meanings the ultimate meaning always contains the idea of aggression, whether it is the simple act of molesting, pricking or censuring, or the violent act of wounding or killing. The verb denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force. It also means to injure, to lacerate, to violate — bodies,

² Literally, a bite, prick or sting; a picket or stake. — *Tr.*

souls, objects — and to destroy. When something breaks, we say: “*Se chingó*.” When someone behaves rashly, in defiance of the rules, we say: “*Hizo una chingadera*.”

The idea of breaking, of ripping open, appears in a great many of these expressions. The word has sexual connotations but it is not a synonym for the sexual act: one may *chingar* a woman without actually possessing her. And when it does allude to the sexual act, violation or deception gives it a particular shading. The man who commits it never does so with the consent of the *chingada*. *Chingar*, then, is to do violence to another. The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, wounds, gashes, stains. And it provokes a bitter, resentful satisfaction.

The person who suffers this action is passive, inert and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person who inflicts it. The *chingón* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent, and it is determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second. The idea of violence rules darkly over all the meanings of the word, and the dialectic of the “closed” and the “open” thus fulfills itself with an almost ferocious precision.

The magic power of the word is intensified by the fact that it is prohibited. No one uses it casually in public. Only an excess of anger or a delirious enthusiasm justifies its use. It is a word that can only be heard among men or during the big fiestas. When we shout it out, we break a veil of silence, modesty or hypocrisy. We reveal ourselves as we really are. The forbidden words boil up in us, just as our emotions boil up. When they finally burst out, they do so harshly, brutally, in the form of a shout, a challenge, an offense. They are projectiles or knives. They cause wounds.

The Spaniards also abuse their strongest expressions; indeed, the Mexican is singularly nice in comparison. But while the Spaniards enjoy using blasphemy and scatology, we specialize in cruelty and sadism. The Spaniard is simple: he insults God because he believes in Him. Blasphemy, as Machado wrote, is a prayer in reverse. The pleasure that many Spaniards, including some of their greatest poets, derive from allusions to body wastes, and from mixing excrement with sacred matters, is reminiscent of children playing with mud. In addition to resentment, there is that delight in contrasts which produced the Baroque style and the drama of great Spanish painting. Only a Spaniard can speak with authority about Onan and Don Juan. In Mexican expressions, on the contrary, we cannot find the Spanish duality that is symbolized by the opposition of the real and the ideal, the mystics and the picaresque heroes, the funereal Quevedo and the scatological Quevedo. What we find is the dichotomy between the closed and the open. The verb *chingar* signifies the triumph of the closed, the male, the powerful, over the open.

If we take into account all of its various meanings, the word defines a great part of our life and qualifies our relationships with our friends and compatriots. To the Mexican there are only two possibilities in life: either he inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* on others, or else he suffers them himself at the hands of others. This conception of social life as combat fatally divides society into the strong and the weak. The strong — the hard, unscrupulous *chingones* — surround themselves with eager followers. This servility toward the strong, especially among the *políticos* (that is, the professionals of public business), is one of the more deplorable consequences of the situation. Another, no less degrading, is the devotion to personalities rather than to principles. Our politicians frequently mix public

business with private. It does not matter. Their wealth or their influence in government allows them to maintain a flock of supporters whom the people call, most appositely, *lambiscones* (from the word *lamer*: "to lick").

The verb *chingar* — malign and agile and playful, like a caged animal — creates many expressions that turn our world into a jungle: there are tigers in business, eagles in the schools and the army, lions among our friends. A bribe is called a "bite." The bureaucrats gnaw their "bones" (public employment). And in a world of *chingones*, of difficult relationships, ruled by violence and suspicion — a world in which no one opens out or surrenders himself — ideas and accomplishments count for little. The only thing of value is manliness, personal strength, a capacity for imposing oneself on others.

The word also has another, more restricted meaning. When we say, "*Vete a la chingada*,"³ we send a person to a distant place. Distant, vague and indeterminate. To the country of broken and worn-out things. A gray country, immense and empty, that is not located anywhere. It is not only because of simple phonetic association that we compare it with China, for China is also immense and remote. The *chingada*, because of constant usage, contradictory meanings and the friction of angry or enthusiastic lips, wastes away, loses its contents and disappears. It is a hollow word. It says nothing. It is Nothingness itself.

After this digression, it is possible to answer the question, "What is the *Chingada*?" The *Chingada* is the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived. The *hijo de la Chingada* is the offspring of violation, abduction or deceit. If we compare this expression with the Spanish *hijo de puta* (son of a whore), the

³ Somewhat stronger than "Go to Hell." — Tr.

difference is immediately obvious. To the Spaniard, dishonor consists in being the son of a woman who voluntarily surrenders herself: a prostitute. To the Mexican it consists in being the fruit of a violation.

Manuel Cabrera points out that the Spanish attitude reflects a moral and historical conception of original sin, while that of the Mexican, deeper and more genuine, transcends both ethics and anecdotes. In effect, every woman — even when she gives herself willingly — is torn open by the man, is the *Chingada*. In a certain sense all of us, by the simple fact of being born of woman, are *hijos de la Chingada*, sons of Eve. But the singularity of the Mexican resides, I believe, in his violent, sarcastic humiliation of the Mother and his no less violent affirmation of the Father. A woman friend of mine (women are more aware of the strangeness of this situation) has made me see that this admiration for the Father — who is a symbol of the closed, the aggressive — expresses itself very clearly in a saying we use when we want to demonstrate our superiority: "I am your father." The question of origins, then, is the central secret of our anxiety and anguish. It is worth studying the significance of this fact.

We are alone. Solitude, the source of anxiety, begins on the day we are deprived of maternal protection and fall into a strange and hostile world. We have fallen, and this fall — this knowledge that we have fallen — makes us guilty. Of what? Of a nameless wrong: that of having been born. These feelings are common to all men and there is nothing specifically Mexican in them. Therefore it is not necessary to repeat a description that has been given many times before. What is necessary is to isolate certain traits and emotions that cast a particular light on the universal condition of man.

In all civilizations, God the Father becomes an ambivalent

figure once he has dethroned the feminine deities. On the one hand, the Father embodies the generative power, the origin of life, whether he be Jehovah, God the Creator, or Zeus, king of creation, ruler of the cosmos. On the other hand, he is the first principle, the One, from whom all is born and to whom all must return. But he is also the lord of the lightning bolt and the whip; he is the tyrant, the ogre who devours life. This aspect — angry Jehovah, God of wrath, or Saturn, or Zeus the violator of women — is the one that appears almost exclusively in Mexican representations of manly power. The *macho* represents the masculine pole of life. The phrase “I am your father” has no paternal flavor and is not said in order to protect or to guide another, but rather to impose one’s superiority, that is, to humiliate. Its real meaning is no different from that of the verb *chingar* and its derivatives. The *macho* is the *gran chingón*. One word sums up the aggressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability and other attributes of the *macho*: power. It is force without the discipline of any notion of order: arbitrary power, the will without reins and without a set course.

Unpredictability adds another element to the character of the *macho*. He is a humorist. His jokes are huge and individual, and they always end in absurdity. The anecdote about the man who “cured” the headache of a drinking companion by emptying his pistol into his head is well known. True or not, the incident reveals the inexorable rigor with which the logic of the absurd is introduced into life. The *macho* commits *chingaderas*, that is, unforeseen acts that produce confusion, horror and destruction. He opens the world; in doing so, he rips and tears it, and this violence provokes a great, sinister laugh. And in its own way, it is just: it re-establishes the equilibrium and puts things in their places, by reducing them to dust, to misery, to nothingness. The humor of the *macho* is an act of revenge.

A psychologist would say that resentment is the basis of his character. It would not be difficult to perceive certain homosexual inclinations also, such as the use and abuse of the pistol, a phallic symbol which discharges death rather than life, and the fondness for exclusively masculine guilds. But whatever may be the origin of these attitudes, the fact is that the essential attribute of the *macho* — power — almost always reveals itself as a capacity for wounding, humiliating, annihilating. Nothing is more natural, therefore, than his indifference toward the offspring he engenders. He is not the founder of a people; he is not a patriarch who exercises *patria potestas*; he is not a king or a judge or the chieftain of a clan. He is power isolated in its own potency, without relationship or compromise with the outside world. He is pure incommunication, a solitude that devours itself and everything it touches. He does not pertain to our world; he is not from our city; he does not live in our neighborhood. He comes from far away: he is always far away. He is the Stranger. It is impossible not to notice the resemblance between the figure of the *macho* and that of the Spanish conquistador. This is the model — more mythical than real — that determines the images the Mexican people form of men in power: caciques, feudal lords, hacienda owners, politicians, generals, captains of industry. They are all *machos*, *chingones*.

The *macho* has no heroic or divine counterpart. Hidalgo, the “father of the fatherland” as it is customary to call him in the ritual gibberish of the Republic, is a defenseless old man, more an incarnation of the people’s helplessness against force than an image of the wrath and power of an awe-inspiring father. Among the numerous patron saints of the Mexicans there is none who resembles the great masculine divinities. Finally, there is no especial veneration for God the Father in the Trinity. He is a dim figure at best. On the other hand, there is profound

devotion to Christ as the Son of God, as the youthful God, above all as the victimized Redeemer. The village churches have a great many images of Jesus — on the cross, or covered with thorns and wounds — in which the insolent realism of the Spaniards is mingled with the tragic symbolism of the Indians. On the one hand, the wounds are flowers, pledges of resurrection; on the other, they are a reiteration that life is the sorrowful mask of death.

The fervor of the cult of God the Son would seem to be explained, at first glance, as an inheritance from the pre-Hispanic religions. When the Spaniards arrived, almost all of the great masculine divinities — with the exception of the rain-god Tláloc, a child and an old man at the same time, and a deity of greater antiquity — were sons of gods, like Xipe, god of the young corn, and Huitzilopochtli, the “Warrior of the South.” Perhaps it is not idle to recall that the birth of Huitzilopochtli offers more than one analogy with that of Christ: he too was conceived without carnal contact; the divine messenger was likewise a bird (that dropped a feather into the lap of the earth-goddess Coatlicue); and finally, the infant Huitzilopochtli also had to escape the persecution of a mythical Herod. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to use these analogies to explain that devotion to Christ, just as it would be to attribute that devotion to a mere survival of the cult of the sons of gods. The Mexican venerates a bleeding and humiliated Christ, a Christ who has been beaten by the soldiers and condemned by the judges, because he sees in him a transfigured image of his own identity. And this brings to mind Cuauhtémoc, the young Aztec emperor who was dethroned, tortured and murdered by Cortés.

Cuauhtémoc means “Falling Eagle.” The Mexican chieftain rose to power at the beginning of the siege of México-Tenochtitlán, when the Aztecs had been abandoned by their gods, their

vassals and their allies. Even his relationship with a woman fits the archetype of the young hero, at one and the same time the lover and the son of the goddess. Thus López Velarde wrote that Cuauhtémoc went out to meet Cortés — that is, to the final sacrifice — “separated from the curved breast of the Empress.” He is a warrior but he is also a child. The exception is that the heroic cycle does not end with his death: the fallen hero awaits resurrection. It is not surprising that for the majority of Mexicans Cuauhtémoc should be the “young grandfather,” the origin of Mexico: the hero’s tomb is the cradle of the people. This is the dialectic of myth, and Cuauhtémoc is more a myth than a historical figure. Another element enters here, an analogy that makes this history a true poem in search of fulfillment: the location of Cuauhtémoc’s tomb is not known. The mystery of his burial place is one of our obsessions. To discover it would mean nothing less than to return to our origins, to reunite ourselves with our ancestry, to break out of our solitude. It would be a resurrection.

If we ask about the third figure of the triad, the Mother, we hear a double answer. It is no secret to anyone that Mexican Catholicism is centered about the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the first place, she is an Indian Virgin; in the second place, the scene of her appearance to the Indian Juan Diego was a hill that formerly contained a sanctuary dedicated to Tonantzin, “Our Mother,” the Aztec goddess of fertility. We know that the Conquest coincided with the apogee of the cult of two masculine divinities: Quetzalcóatl, the self-sacrificing god, and Huitzilopochtli, the young warrior-god. The defeat of these gods — which is what the Conquest meant to the Indian world, because it was the end of a cosmic cycle and the inauguration of a new divine kingdom — caused the faithful to return to the ancient feminine deities. This phenomenon of a

return to the maternal womb, so well known to the psychologist, is without doubt one of the determining causes of the swift popularity of the cult of the Virgin. The Indian goddesses were goddesses of fecundity, linked to the cosmic rhythms, the vegetative processes and agrarian rites. The Catholic Virgin is also the Mother (some Indian pilgrims still call her Guadalupe-Tonantzin), but her principal attribute is not to watch over the fertility of the earth but to provide refuge for the unfortunate. The situation has changed: the worshipers do not try to make sure of their harvests but to find a mother's lap. The Virgin is the consolation of the poor, the shield of the weak, the help of the oppressed. In sum, she is the Mother of orphans. All men are born disinherited and their true condition is orphanhood, but this is particularly true among the Indians and the poor in Mexico. The cult of the Virgin reflects not only the general condition of man but also a concrete historical situation, in both the spiritual and material realms. In addition, the Virgin — the universal Mother — is also the intermediary, the messenger, between disinherited man and the unknown, inscrutable power: the Strange.

In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgin Mother, the *Chingada* is the violated Mother. Neither in her nor in the Virgin do we find traces of the darker attributes of the great goddesses: the lasciviousness of Amaterasu and Aphrodite, the cruelty of Artemis and Astarte, the sinister magic of Circe or the blood-lust of Kali. Both of them are passive figures. Guadalupe is pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passions. The *Chingada* is even more passive. Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides, as we said earlier, in her sex. This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her

identity: she is the *Chingada*. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition.

If the *Chingada* is a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is doña Malinche, the mistress of Cortés. It is true that she gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador, but he forgot her as soon as her usefulness was over. Doña Marina⁴ becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the *chingado*, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians. Cuauhtémoc and Doña Marina are thus two antagonistic and complementary figures. There is nothing surprising about our cult of the young emperor — “the only hero at the summit of art,” an image of the sacrificed son — and there is also nothing surprising about the curse that weighs against La Malinche. This explains the success of the contemptuous adjective *malinchista* recently put into circulation by the newspapers to denounce all those who have been corrupted by foreign influences. The *malinchistas* are those who want Mexico to open itself to the outside world: the true sons of La Malinche, who is the *Chingada* in person. Once again we see the opposition of the closed and the open.

When we shout “¡Viva México, hijos de la chingada!” we express our desire to live closed off from the outside world and, above all, from the past. In this shout we condemn our origins

⁴The name given to La Malinche by the Spaniards. — Tr.

and deny our hybridism. The strange permanence of Cortés and La Malinche in the Mexican's imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved. When he repudiates La Malinche — the Mexican Eve, as she was represented by José Clemente Orozco in his mural in the National Preparatory School — the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude.

The Mexican condemns all his traditions at once, the whole set of gestures, attitudes and tendencies in which it is now difficult to distinguish the Spanish from the Indian. For that reason the Hispanic thesis, which would have us descend from Cortés to the exclusion of La Malinche, is the patrimony of a few extremists who are not even pure whites. The same can be said of indigenist propaganda, which is also supported by fanatical *criollos* and *mestizos*, while the Indians have never paid it the slightest attention. The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard. Nor does he want to be descended from them. He denies them. And he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an abstraction: he is a man. He becomes the son of Nothingness. His beginnings are in his own self.

This attitude is revealed not only in our daily life but also in the course of our history, which at certain moments has been the embodiment of a will to eradicate all that has gone before. It is astonishing that a country with such a vivid past — a country so profoundly traditional, so close to its roots, so rich in ancient legends even if poor in modern history — should conceive of itself only as a negation of its origins.

Our shout strips us naked and discloses the wound that we alternately flaunt and conceal, but it does not show us the causes of this separation from, and negation of, the Mother, not

even when we recognize that such a rupture has occurred. In lieu of a closer examination of the problem, we will suggest that the liberal Reform movement of the middle of the last century seems to be the moment when the Mexican decided to break with his traditions, which is a form of breaking with oneself. If our Independence movement cut the ties that bound us to Spain, the Reform movement denied that the Mexican nation as a historical project should perpetuate the colonial tradition. Juárez and his generation founded a state whose ideals are distinct from those that animated New Spain or the pre-Cortesian cultures. The Mexican state proclaimed an abstract and universal conception of man: the Republic is not composed of *criollos*, Indians and *mestizos* (as the Laws of the Indies, with a great love for distinctions and a great respect for the heterogeneous nature of the colonial world, had specified) but simply of men alone. All alone.

The Reform movement is the great rupture with the Mother. This separation was a necessary and inevitable act, because every life that is truly autonomous begins as a break with its family and its past. But the separation still hurts. We still suffer from that wound. That is why the feeling of orphanhood is the constant background of our political endeavors and our personal conflicts. Mexico is all alone, like each one of her sons.

The Mexican and his Mexicanism must be defined as separation and negation. And, at the same time, as a search, a desire to transcend this state of exile. In sum, as a vivid awareness of solitude, both historical and personal. History, which could not tell us anything about the nature of our feelings and conflicts, can now show us how that break came about and how we have attempted to transcend our solitude.